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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4003
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9730
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0879
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 001254

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM NP

SUBJECT: WOMEN POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERS WANT INTRA-PARTY
DEMOCRACY

REF: KATHMANDU 1189

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Awareness Raised

¶1. (C) The Ambassador met with nine members of the newly formed Women's Caucus, a group of women politicians from the seven-party alliance and other major parties, on May 15 to discuss the role of women in Nepali politics. The women noted that there was now a higher understanding of the importance of ensuring that women and ethnic groups were represented in politics than there had been in 1990. However, the women lamented the senior party leaders' lack of will to put their words into action. The women explained that, on average, party central working committees (CWC) were only about ten percent women. Sahana Pradhan, CPN-UML CWC member, noted that only seven percent of her party's CWC were women and nine percent of the Nepali Congress CWC were women. Prativa Rana, RPP CWC member, said that although she had been elected to the CWC with the highest number of votes, men in the party were reluctant to give her any additional responsibility because she was a woman.

¶2. (C) The women thanked the USG and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which had helped them to form their caucus in March 2006 with the aim of improving women's representation. The caucus planned to start women's caucus groups at the grassroots level in each district to increase women's participation in politics. The women stated that a base of more women politicians and supporters at the local level would make advancing women's roles and rights at the national level easier. They acknowledged this was a long-term process, however. Urmila Aryal, CPN-UML Member of Parliament, noted that women in rural areas played an unprecedented role in the recent people's movement because they had suffered most under the ongoing Maoist insurgency.

But Words Need to Be Put into Action

¶3. (C) Noting that only twelve of 205 members of the current Parliament were female, Rana explained that in order to be a

national party in the past, a party had to field women candidates in at least five percent of constituencies. The women wanted to increase this number. Pradhan explained that women made up half the population so women should be fifty percent of politicians. However, she said she realized that women would have to settle for less initially so the women collectively were pressing the government to ensure women's rights in the new constitution and the constituent assembly by requiring that thirty-three percent of candidates be female. They noted there was an ongoing debate on how to organize the constituent assembly elections, and it was not yet decided how to ensure representation from different constituencies and ethnicities.

Ongoing Concerns

¶4. (C) The group noted the importance of women's participation in constituent assembly elections so that the issues they cared about would not be neglected. They wanted to ensure equal rights for women and ethnic groups, including representation in Parliament. They also wanted all mothers to be able to pass along citizenship to their children, something that only unmarried women can do under current law.

Aryal highlighted the importance of defining constituencies in getting more ethnic groups and more women elected. She explained that her Parsa constituency was drawn from north to south, effectively splitting the different ethnic groups, which were divided along east-west lines. If her constituency was redrawn from east to west, then a terai woman would only have to campaign in a terai constituency, and a hill woman would campaign in a hill constituency. She pointed out that constituencies should not be drawn in Kathmandu, because people from the regions knew their areas

much better. Aryal also said that she was working with legal activists to review all relevant laws with the aim of getting Parliament to issue a proclamation making all discriminatory laws illegal.

Comment

¶5. (C) As with student leaders (reftel), the women leaders are smart, insightful and dynamic. The group has organized women to pressure the Parliament to listen to their concerns.

The parties must become more inclusive at the top if they are to truly represent the will of the people and bring democracy to Nepal. One good step would be to appoint more than one female Cabinet member.

MORIARTY